Noah was the perfect boy—until he wasn't.

Haunted by questions of identity, faith, and the suffocating silence of shame, Noah's life begins to unravel in the places no one sees. But this is not a story of collapse. This is a story of becoming—through fire, through music, through whispered prayers in the dark.

In a voice as raw as it is redemptive, *Where the Lost Are Found* traces the deeply personal journey of a boy finding God not in perfection, but in surrender.

A Becoming Noah Story — because sometimes, the road to grace begins with being lost

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

"He left the ninety-nine to find the one—
even when the one wasn't sure he wanted to be found."

For the ones who walked in shadows,
and still dared to believe the Light would find them.
You are not alone...

THE GOLDEN SHELL

Chapter One

It's strange how people praise silence in children. They call it maturity. Good manners. Discipline.
But sometimes, silence isn't peace—it's pressure.
It's the weight of everything you can't say, buried deep where no one will look.

I learned early how to keep things hidden: the doubts, the fear, the aching loneliness. I became a master of it. At school, I was *"so well-behaved."* At home, *"such a quiet boy."*
But nobody asked why.

They say home is where you feel safe.
For me, home was where I perfected my mask.
My room was both my refuge and my prison. The door stayed shut more often than not. I told myself I liked it that way, but the truth was, I was afraid—afraid that if I opened up, if anyone really saw me, they'd turn away. Or worse, they'd tell me to stop being dramatic.
To toughen up.
To be normal.

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But I wasn't normal. I knew that.

I felt too much, thought too much, and said too little. There were days I'd lie awake for hours, staring at the ceiling, feeling like I was floating outside my own body—watching someone else live my life.
I smiled when I was supposed to. I nodded when I had to. I laughed on cue.
But the more I played the part, the more I disappeared.

Then came the day that shattered it all.

It didn't start as a storm. It started like every other ordinary day—sunlight leaking through the curtains, the sound of plates clinking in the kitchen, voices carrying through walls.
But sometimes, the quietest mornings hide the loudest truths.
Sometimes, a single moment—an offhand comment, a look, a forgotten promise—can be the final straw on a soul already cracking under the weight of pretending.

And on that day, I broke.

But before we get to that, you need to understand what led me there—the small fractures, the missed signs, the slow collapse behind the curtain no one ever bothered to pull back.
This isn't just a story about pain. It's about perception.
About what people choose to see—and what they don't.

Have you ever imagined a child so misunderstood that even his own parents couldn't truly see him?
A child whose world was hidden behind a curtain—quiet, watchful, and known only to himself?

I was that child.

To others, I was good as gold—polite, obedient, promising.
But beneath that shine, I was only gold-plated.
A hollow shell masked in smiles.
Like a mango, ripe and golden on the outside, but inside? I was rotting.

No one saw it.
No one wanted to.
Not until everything cracked wide open.

Have you ever been praised so much it starts to feel like a curse?

That was me.

Everyone said I was the perfect child.
Teachers admired me. My parents never worried. The church clapped when I sang.
I was the soft-spoken one—always in uniform, always on time, always respectful. I said the right things, kept quiet when needed, and read my Bible like it was the only book in the world.
To them, I was a shining example. A walking testimony. The golden boy.

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But gold can be deceiving. Sometimes it's just a thin coat of paint over something broken beneath.

For fifteen years, I carried something I couldn't explain. I didn't even know what to call it. All I knew was that it didn't fit into the sermons, or the prayers, or the careful plans everyone had made for me.
It was a feeling. A longing I didn't ask for.
It showed up in my thoughts when I least expected it—in my dreams, in the way I noticed certain people, in the tight grip of guilt that always followed.

I buried it so deep, it started to feel like it belonged to someone else.
I called it my "silly behaviour."
Because if I gave it a real name, it might become too real.
Too dangerous.

I begged God to take it away.
I fasted. I cried.
I whispered my fears into pillows late at night, too ashamed to say them out loud.

But the feelings didn't disappear.
They just got quieter.

Trickier.
And I became better at pretending...

It was second term, Form Two.
I remember the weather—it had rained for days. The football field was soaked and muddy. My shoes never dried properly, and the laundry line behind the dorms sagged under the weight of wet uniforms.

Life looked normal from the outside.
But inside, everything was shifting. Quietly.

Malik wasn't the kind of boy I normally talked to. He was loud, confident, always surrounded by people. He said whatever he wanted, laughed too loudly, and moved like someone who owned the world.

But somehow, over a few weeks, he started coming closer.
Asking strange questions.
Standing next to me during meals.
Walking with me when I fetched water.
He said it was about choir practice—even though he couldn't sing.

One night, just before lights were out, he followed me back to my bed.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

"Help me with that line you were singing," he said, sitting down beside me. "The one from the chorus."

I looked at him. My heart was already racing, though I didn't know why yet.

"You don't even sing," I said, smiling faintly, trying to brush it off.

He shrugged. "I'm trying to learn."

I opened the songbook and hummed the melody, hoping the moment would pass.

Then he asked a question I wasn't ready for.

"Do you ever get… weird feelings?"

I froze.

He was staring at the ceiling, but I could feel his eyes on me. My heart thudded against my ribs. I wanted to ask what he meant—but I already knew. I had lived with that question for years.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I whispered.

"Yes, you do."

There was a long silence between us. Not the uncomfortable kind, but the dangerous kind—the kind that opens doors to things you're not supposed to feel.
He leaned in slightly, just enough for my breath to catch.
And for a moment—just a moment—I leaned too.

But I stopped.
I pulled back.
I shook my head. "We can't."

He didn't say anything after that.
Just got up and left.

But the damage was already done.

The next morning, everything had changed. Whispers followed me down the hall. Eyes lingered too long.
People I had never spoken to suddenly knew my name.

By lunch, I could hear them clearly—
"That's him."
"That's the boy."
"Did you hear what he did?"
And Malik?

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

He told them I tried to touch him.
That I had done things to him in the dorm while he was asleep.
That I was confused. Sick. Not like the rest.

They believed him.

Because he was loud. Because he was confident.
Because I was the quiet one.
And quiet boys don't fight back.

By evening, I was sitting outside the headmaster's office.
My hands were cold. My chest felt hollow.
I was waiting—for my parents, for the punishment, for the shame.

The chaplain sat next to me, flipping through a worn Bible, glancing at me every few seconds like he was waiting for me to confess.

He didn't know the truth.
No one asked me for it.

When my parents arrived, my mother looked like she'd aged ten years in one afternoon.
My father didn't even look at me.
He just signed the forms.

No one said my name.
No one asked me what really happened.
No one wanted to know.

I was expelled the next morning.

Just like that, fifteen years of goodness—wiped away by a single accusation.
A single moment of *almost*.

The ride home was silent. I sat in the backseat, staring out the window, watching the world pass by like it was no longer mine.

I felt numb. Empty.
The voice in my head kept repeating: *You didn't even do it.*

But that didn't matter.

In their eyes, I had done worse.
I had tried.
And in a world like mine, trying was enough to condemn you.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

At home, no one spoke to me.
I went straight to my room. Closed the door.
Sat on the edge of the bed and stared at the wall for what felt like hours.

I didn't cry. I wanted to.
But I didn't.
I just sat there, waiting—for someone to knock.
For someone to ask me if I was okay.

No one did.

Later that night, I heard the clinking of dishes in the kitchen.
I heard my father praying—louder than usual, as if he was trying to drown out the memory of me.
My mother moved through the house like a ghost.
Not once did she come to my room.
No one said my name.

The next morning, she dropped a pair of clothes on my bed.

"We're going to Pastor Elkanah's," she said, her voice stiff.
"He said he'll pray for you."

I didn't argue.
I didn't speak.
I just got dressed and followed her out.

Pastor Elkanah lived just a few streets away. I had seen him preach since I was a child—tall, stern-faced, with a voice that always sounded like it came straight from heaven.

I used to admire him.
Now, I dreaded what he would say.

We sat in a cramped backroom of his house. Curtains drawn. Bibles open.
The air thick with the scent of anointing oil.
My parents sat on either side of me, their faces unreadable.

"Noah," he said, folding his hands slowly, "we've heard the things that have happened. I want you to know there is healing. There is deliverance. But only if you're willing to let go of this… confusion."

Confusion.
That's what they called it now.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

He asked me to confess.
I told him I hadn't done anything.
That I had thought about it—yes—but I hadn't gone through with it.

He smiled sadly, like he already knew better.

"That's how the enemy works," he said. "He plants thoughts. Silly thoughts. Small desires. And before you know it, they grow into chains."

I stayed quiet.

They laid hands on me.
Prayed over me.
Rebuked things I couldn't name.
Declared me free.

But I didn't feel free.
I felt like a ghost in my own skin.
Like they were trying to fix a version of me that never even existed.

I developed a new routine to survive.

I started writing in secret.
Just in a notebook I found tucked away in a drawer.
I tore out the pages with prayers already written on them and started filling the rest with my own.

Not the prayers I was supposed to say—but the ones I actually meant.

"God, I'm scared."
"I don't know how to change."
"I don't know if I even want to anymore."
"Why do You feel so far away?"
"Why do I?"

Some nights, I wondered what would happen if I never got better. If this "silly behavior" never went away. If I'd carry this secret forever, hidden under my skin, buried beneath everyone's expectations.

Would I ever sing again?
Would I ever laugh the same way?
Would anyone ever hug me without thinking twice?

One afternoon, weeks later, I snuck out.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

I didn't plan to. I just needed air—real air.
Not the thick, prayer-soaked atmosphere of the living room.
Not the tight, watching silence of the kitchen.

I walked down the road with my hoodie pulled low, my hands in my pockets, hoping no one I knew would see me.
My legs took me past the field, through the shortcut we used to take to school, and toward the edge of the estate where no one ever went.

There was an old abandoned gate there, rusted and half-hanging, leading to an empty plot overgrown with weeds.

I sat there for an hour. Maybe two.

I didn't cry.
I didn't pray.

I just... breathed.

For the first time since everything had fallen apart, I felt like *Noah* again—not the disappointment, not the boy who almost did something wrong, not the burden his family was trying to fix.

Just a boy, sitting in the wind, letting the world move without him for a little while.

And maybe that's what survival looks like sometimes—
Not strength.
Not certainty.
Not faith.

Just stillness.
Just staying.
Just not giving up.

That night, when I got home, no one asked where I'd been.
Maybe they didn't notice.
Maybe they didn't care.

I opened my notebook and wrote one more thing:

"I'm still here."

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

Chapter Two

The Weight of Breathing

Before the silence, before the stares and the shame, before Malik and the rumors and the prayers meant to fix me—I was just a child.

I wasn't always afraid of myself.

In fact, there was a time I was… happy.

I was seven when people started calling me "special." Not because I could do something incredible. Not because I was louder or faster or better than the other kids. No—I was called special because I was quiet. Because I obeyed without being told twice. Because I sat still in church and learned memory verses by heart. Because I cried when people prayed hard and raised their voices.

At Sunday school, the teachers used to hold my hand when we walked into the sanctuary, as if I were some little prophet in training. They'd ask me to pray out loud because they said my prayers sounded grown-up. I didn't even understand half the things I was saying—I was just repeating the words I'd heard my mother say. But still, they called me chosen.

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At home, my mother would smile when visitors praised me. "He's not like the others," she'd say proudly. "So obedient. He even helps with dishes without being asked."

And that's what I became: the helper, the singer, the "yes, Mum," "yes, Dad," always-smiling boy. The perfect son.

But I wonder now—was that ever really me?

Or was I just learning early how to earn love?

The first time I ever felt different, I was nine. It was subtle. Nothing dramatic. Just a moment—fleeting, quiet, and terrifying.

I remember I was playing with two older boys from the neighborhood, both in upper primary. We were building something with sticks and stones behind one of the unfinished houses down the road. One of them took his shirt off because it was hot. The other did too. And for some reason I didn't understand, my chest tightened.

It wasn't desire. Not yet. It was something else. A kind of curiosity that felt dangerous.

I looked away immediately. But I felt it.

A shift inside me.

Like something had turned on—and I didn't know how to turn it off.

That night, I prayed harder than I'd ever prayed before.

"God, please take this away. I don't want to be like this."

It was the first time I ever cried about something I couldn't name.

The first time I felt shame that didn't belong to anything I had done—just something I had felt.

The years after that became a quiet war inside me.

I doubled down on goodness.

I sang louder in church.

I volunteered to clean the sanctuary.

I made friends with girls—never too close, but just enough to seem normal.

And I watched myself carefully—every glance, every gesture, every word. I learned how to talk like the other boys. I learned how to laugh at the right jokes, even when they hurt me. I learned how to shrink the truth into something no one would suspect.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

That's how the mask formed.

It didn't happen all at once. It built itself slowly—like a second skin.

By the time I got to Form One, I was the golden boy everyone wanted me to be. I was disciplined. I was composed. I even led morning prayers at school when the teacher on duty asked. People trusted me.

But I couldn't trust myself.

Because every time I got too comfortable, too close, too curious… the shame came roaring back.

Every time a boy brushed past me and my stomach fluttered, I felt like a fraud in my own skin.

Every time I imagined someone finding out, I could almost hear the sermons already forming: "That spirit must be cast out."

So, I buried it.

And buried it.

And buried it again.

Until the night when Malik dug it all up…

There was a boy.

His name was Eli.

He came into my life like a breeze—soft, unannounced, and gone too soon.

We were both ten. He had just moved to our neighborhood from Nakuru. His family lived in the two-storey flats with the broken satellite dish on the roof. The first time I saw him, he was standing outside their gate, licking a mango like it was a secret. He had a scar across his eyebrow, the kind that made him look brave, even though he was shorter than me.

He looked at me once. Just once.

And smiled.

That was it.

That smile—easy, wide, careless. It sat somewhere deep inside me for days. I didn't understand it, not really. All I knew was that something about it made the world quieter.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

We became friends quickly. After school, we'd sit under the tree by the corner shop, scraping sticks into the dirt, inventing names for birds, counting cars, laughing at nothing. He liked to talk about animals—snakes, mostly. I liked to listen.

He was the first boy I was ever completely unguarded around.

With Eli, I didn't worry about how I sat, or how I spoke, or whether I looked "right." I forgot to pretend. And in those afternoons, something strange happened—I felt like me.

Not the golden boy. Not the choir child. Just Noah. Just a boy.

But sweetness never lasts, does it?

One afternoon, we were playing with bottle tops when he leaned back against the wall, looked at me, and said, "Do you think people stay friends forever?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe."

He looked at me for a while—longer than usual. His eyes were soft in that way that makes you hold your breath. "I think I'd like to," he said.

I didn't answer. My hands were shaking, and I didn't know why.

He smiled again, stood up, and dusted his shorts. “My mum says we might move again. Maybe even next month.”

And just like that, the breeze turned.

I didn’t sleep that night. I couldn’t. Something was breaking open in me—something I didn’t have words for yet. I thought about Eli's smile, and it made my chest feel warm and sick at the same time. I felt like I was betraying something sacred. But I didn’t even know what.

The next day, I avoided him.

And the day after that.

He called my name as I crossed the field. I pretended not to hear.

He knocked once on our gate. I watched from the curtain and didn’t move.

The silence between us grew until one day, he was gone.

No goodbye. No warning. Just... gone.

I told myself I was doing the right thing. That God had helped me escape something sinful. But the truth?

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I missed him. Badly.

For weeks after he left, I would walk past his empty flat and hope to hear his laugh again. I would pick up sticks like we used to and draw in the dirt, alone. I would write his name in the corners of my notebooks, then scribble it out before anyone could see.

That was the first time I understood that I could love someone in a way I wasn’t supposed to.

And also, the first time I learned how to lose them without a sound.

That memory stayed buried for years.

Until Malik.

Until the headmaster’s office.

Until my mother’s silence and the chaplain’s prayers.

And now, lying here, in this room that feels smaller every day, I realize something:

I never got to say goodbye to Eli.

Just like no one said goodbye to me…

I don't know what time it is.
Maybe two. Maybe three.
The ceiling above me is just darkness now—thicker than before, pressing down like a heavy blanket I can't throw off. My room is quiet except for the soft hum of the fridge outside and the occasional creak from the wind against my window frame. But inside me?
It's loud.

The silence doesn't soothe me anymore. It scratches. Echoes. Repeats the same sentence again and again:
You left him.

I hadn't thought of Eli in years. Not really. Not like this. But tonight, out of nowhere, the memory of him came back like a ghost—so soft and clear, it felt like he'd been sitting in this room with me all along.

Maybe that's what guilt is. Not a monster hiding in the dark, but a memory you didn't give a proper goodbye. A name you scratched out too soon. A smile that returns when everything else has been taken.

I didn't even do anything with Eli. Nothing ever happened. But what we shared—the way I felt when I was near him—it cracked something in me that never really healed.

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Now I lie here in a bed that no longer feels mine, in a house where people speak in hushed tones, praying for deliverance, hoping their son will "come back to himself."
They don't understand.
They never saw me leave.

My mother thinks I sleep too much. She doesn't realize that sleep is the only place where I still feel free. She wakes me early now, even when there's nothing to do. Hands me books. Scriptures. Tells me to read them aloud so "the Word will fill the air."

I do as she says.
Because saying no takes energy I don't have anymore.

Today, she left a new devotional on my bed. One with a blue cover and gold lettering. *Finding Your True Self in Christ.*

The irony almost made me laugh.

I flipped it open, let the pages fall randomly. Somewhere in the middle, a sentence caught my eye:
"When the prodigal son returned, the father ran to him with open arms. Not because of who he had been, but because of who he still was."

I closed the book.
And just sat there.

If only it were that simple. If only someone would run to me. Not with oil and scripture and prayers to cast things out—but with arms. Real ones. With warmth. With forgiveness. With the willingness to listen before fixing.

But maybe that's asking for too much.

Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever go back to school.
Not because I want to—but because it was the only place where I could pretend to be normal. I hated it, but at least I knew the script: say your lines, smile in the hallway, avoid eye contact in the dorm, get through the day.

Here at home, the pretending is harder.
Here, there are no crowds to hide in. No noise to blur the silence. No bells to mark the end of a class, or the start of a meal, or the shift from one version of myself to the next.

Here, I'm just Noah.
And I don't know what that even means anymore.

This evening, my father called me outside.

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It was the first time he'd spoken directly to me in over a week.

He stood on the veranda, arms crossed, staring into the orange-pink sky. He didn't ask me to sit. Just nodded toward the plastic chair beside him. I sat without saying a word.

There was a long pause.

Then he said, "You know what you did was wrong."

Not a question. A declaration.

I nodded. What else could I do?

Another pause. Longer this time.

He sighed. "You've brought shame to this family."

The words didn't sting like I expected. I think I'd already said worse things to myself.

Still, I looked at him. For the first time, I looked at his face—at the lines around his eyes, at the mouth that used to smile at me during Sunday service, the voice that once called me my boy.

That man was gone now.

In his place stood a stranger who carried my name like a burden.

"Dad…" I said, before I could stop myself. "Do you think God still loves me?"

He turned sharply.

His face didn't twist in anger. It didn't soften either.

He just stared. Then said, "God loves you. But He hates sin."

I looked down at my hands.

I wanted to ask, *What if the sin is the only part of me I didn't choose?*

But I didn't. I just nodded again. The moment had already closed.

Later, back in my room, I wrote down three words in the corner of my journal:
Still. Here. Hurting.

Not for attention. Not even for God. Just for me.

A reminder that even in the wreckage, I hadn't disappeared.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

I was still here.
Hurting.
Still.
Here.

And sometimes… maybe that's enough.

The day after my father spoke to me, something inside me began to pulse.

It wasn't anger. Not the kind that explodes. No, this was quieter. Thicker. Slower.

Like heat rising from coals that never quite died.

Maybe I had spent so much time apologizing for being alive that I had forgotten what it felt like to resist. To not fold. To not play dead.

That morning, as I sat at the table eating porridge in silence, I caught my reflection in the window: thin, tired, a shadow of a boy I used to know. My hands were trembling, and for once, I didn't hide them.

Let them see, I thought.
Let them feel the mess they made.

That afternoon, while no one was home, I found myself pulling open my bottom drawer—the one where I kept old books, photos, things my mother never looked through anymore.

At the very bottom, under a pile of hymn booklets and old school reports, I found it.

My music journal.

A blue-covered notebook with a few torn pages, some song lyrics I had scribbled in Form One, and one unfinished melody titled *"Half of Me."*

I stared at it for a long time.

Then I picked up my pen and, with hands still shaking, I wrote:

"I used to be golden—
Polished and prayed for.
But no one ever asked
If I was made of fire."

It wasn't perfect. It wasn't even finished.

But it was mine.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

That evening, I sat on my bed, notebook on my lap, lips moving silently through the lines I'd written. And then, like muscle memory, I hummed the melody. Low. Barely audible. But enough.

The air shifted.
The walls leaned in.

And just as I let the last note float into the room, I heard the door creak.

I froze.

It was Zoe—my sister. She must've come in without me hearing. She stood in the doorway, half-hidden by the curtain, her head tilted slightly.

"You're singing again," she said softly.

I opened my mouth, ready to deny it. But something stopped me.

I looked at her. She wasn't angry. She wasn't afraid. She just looked… curious. And a little sad.

"I thought you didn't talk to me anymore," I whispered.

"I didn't know what to say," she answered.

Silence again. But not the heavy kind this time. This one felt like possibility.

She walked in slowly and sat on the edge of my bed.

"What's it about?" she asked, nodding toward the notebook.

I hesitated. Then shrugged. "About being... cut in half. And still breathing."

Zoe nodded, as if that made perfect sense.

She didn't preach. She didn't quote scripture. She just sat there, next to me, her feet not even touching the floor.

And for the first time in weeks, I didn't feel completely alone.

Later that night, I wrote another verse.

"You can't pray out what you never cast in,
I didn't choose the flame—I just lived in the sin.
But even sinners deserve a sunrise."

I read it over and over.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

Even sinners deserve a sunrise.

And that's when I felt it.

The fire.

Not rage. Not rebellion.

But a small, stubborn heat that whispered:

"You are not finished."

The next morning, I did something dangerous.

I sang in the shower.

Softly. Barely. But I let the melody rise like steam. I didn't care who heard. Not today.

Not when I finally felt the burn of my own voice again.

And somewhere, beneath the ash and silence, I could almost hear a whisper:

This is just the beginning.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

Chapter Three

The Boy Who Couldn't Disappear

The days after I sang in the shower were strange—like waking from a dream you weren't sure you wanted to leave behind. The heaviness in the house didn't lift; my mother's prayers still drifted from her room, quiet but relentless, like a tide trying to wash away something deeper than sin. My father's sharp glances cut through the air like knives, silent accusations that left scars heavier than words. But inside me, something new was beginning to flicker. Fragile, shaky, uncertain—but real.

I clutched my music journal like a lifeline, scribbling words and melodies that no one would ever hear. The pages were a patchwork of raw pain and tentative hope—jagged pieces of me sewn together by the faintest threads of light. Some days, the words came easy; other days, they felt like fighting against the weight of water dragging me down.

One afternoon, the shrill ring of the phone shattered the stillness so suddenly I nearly dropped my notebook. I sat frozen, breath caught in my throat, the sound echoing through the quiet house like an alarm. Zoe's voice, soft and cautious, called me over.

"It's for you," she whispered, her eyes wide but gentle—like she was worried and hopeful all at once.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

I took the receiver, my hands trembling. The voice on the other end was unfamiliar but warm, patient.

"Hello, Noah? This is Mr. Kamau, your music teacher from school. I heard about... everything. I just wanted to check on you."

My chest tightened. I wasn't sure how to answer. It had been so long since someone outside my family had spoken to me without judgment or distance.

"Are you okay?" His voice was soft, as if the question could fill the emptiness between us.

"I'm... here," I whispered, unsure if I even believed it.

There was a pause. Then he said, "I've got something for you. Something I think you need. Could we meet?"

I glanced at Zoe, who gave a quiet nod, encouraging me without words.

"Okay," I said, voice shaky but willing.

The next day, I found myself standing outside a small café tucked between two bustling streets. The scent of fresh coffee and old wood drifted out through the open door, mixing with quiet

chatter and the soft clink of cups. It was nothing like the stiff halls of school or the hollow pews of church. This place smelled like possibility—a place where the past could be left behind, at least for a while.

Mr. Kamau was waiting by the window, a gentle smile softening his usually serious face. He motioned to the chair across from him.

"Come, sit," he said kindly.

I sat down, hands clammy, heart pounding like a wild drum inside my chest.

"I was surprised when I heard about your expulsion," he began carefully, unsure whether to tread lightly or be direct. "But I also know the boy behind the headlines."

I swallowed hard. "I'm not sure you do."

He leaned forward, eyes steady, unflinching.

"Noah, I saw the way you played piano during choir practice. The way you let the music carry you. That wasn't just talent—that was honesty."

I looked down, tracing the chipped edge of the table with a trembling finger.

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"Honesty got me kicked out," I muttered, voice breaking.

He shook his head slowly.

"Honesty doesn't get punished. Fear and misunderstanding do."

He reached into his bag and pulled out a small package wrapped in brown paper, placing it gently in front of me.

"This was yours, wasn't it?"

I peeled back the paper slowly. Inside was my old composition book, worn and marked with careless strokes of a boy who once believed music could fix everything.

"Why keep this?" I asked, voice cracking with a strange mix of disbelief and hope.

"Because you're not finished," he said simply. "There are songs inside you that need to be heard, Noah. Even if the world isn't ready."

A lump rose in my throat. No one had said something like that to me in a long time.

"Thank you," I whispered.

He smiled warmly. "You're welcome. And if you ever want to talk, I'm here."

That night, back in my room, I sat cross-legged on the floor, notebook open in my lap. I traced the faded notes with trembling fingers, then began to write—not hiding from the truth anymore, but leaning into it.

I am not the shame they paint,
Not the silence they force,
I am the song that refuses to end,
The boy who couldn't disappear.

The words felt like a lifeline thrown into the dark. Somewhere deep inside, a small flame flickered to life.

Days passed, slow and heavy. I kept my head down, tried to avoid my parents' eyes, their whispered conversations that stopped the moment I came near. But something had shifted inside me. It was as if the music had cracked the shell I'd worn so long—exposing the rawness beneath.

A few afternoons later, Zoe knocked softly on my door again. This time, she carried something.

"I thought you might want some company," she said shyly, holding out a battered guitar she'd found in the attic.

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I hesitated but nodded. For the first time in months, we played music together—not for church, not for anyone else—but just us, two broken pieces trying to make something whole.

Zoe smiled at me, her eyes bright with something I hadn't seen in a long time—hope.

"You're not alone," she said quietly.

And for the first time, I believed it.

Still, beneath the flicker of hope, I knew this was only the beginning. Outside, the world waited with its whispers and judgments. The fire inside me was fragile—and I wasn't sure if it would burn out or grow.

That night, lying awake in the dark, I listened to the silence and thought about Eli—the boy with the scar and the smile I never got to say goodbye to. The boy who had unknowingly sparked something inside me I could no longer hide.

Even in the darkest silence, a song can find its voice.

And maybe, just maybe, mine was finally ready to be heard.

That night, after Zoe left, I lay on my bed staring at the ceiling. The room was still, but inside me, a storm raged—silent but relentless. The melody I'd sung earlier still echoed faintly in my ears, a secret I had shared with no one but myself. It was fragile, shaky, but it was mine.

I wondered if this was what courage felt like—the small moments when you let yourself be seen, even when the world wasn't ready to look. Or maybe it was just desperation, a last thread to hold onto before I disappeared completely.

My thoughts drifted to Eli—the boy with the scar across his eyebrow and a smile that had seemed like a light in my darkest place. I never told him what that smile meant. Maybe because I didn't understand it myself. Maybe because I was still trying to figure out who I was beneath the mask.

I thought of all the pieces of me I'd buried so deep I could hardly find them anymore—the obedient son, the good Christian boy, the golden child everyone wanted. But was that really me? Or just a ghost wearing a mask too heavy to carry?

And yet, despite everything, I was still here. Still breathing. Still fighting to find a voice.

Maybe that was enough.

I closed my eyes and was ten again.

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The afternoon sun spilled through the mango tree, painting golden patches on the cracked earth where Eli and I sat. He held a half-eaten mango, juice sticky on his fingers, the scar on his eyebrow catching the light and making him look braver than he felt.

We scraped sticks into the dirt, naming birds no one else had seen, counting cars, laughing at nothing in particular. The world was quieter then, softer. I was lighter—just a boy, not the burden everyone expected me to carry.

Suddenly, he looked at me, eyes wide and honest.

"Do you think people stay friends forever?" he asked.

I shrugged, unsure of how to answer.

He smiled—soft, sure, like a secret whispered just between us. "I think I'd like to."

His words lingered in the air, fragile as a spider's web.

I wanted to say the same, but the words caught in my throat. Instead, I just nodded.

That moment stayed with me—a hope I wasn't sure I deserved.

And then, like a breeze slipping through my fingers, he was gone, leaving only the echo of his smile.

I breathed deeply, clutching the notebook to my chest.

The boy who couldn't disappear was still here.

Still fighting.

Still singing.

Still alive.

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Chapter Four

The Quiet Revolution (Deep Within)

The day begins quietly, but inside me, a storm brews—a slow, simmering upheaval no one else can see. It isn't the kind of chaos that screams or shatters windows. It's quieter. A pulse in my chest. A tug in my gut. A whisper beneath the noise.

I lie awake, staring at the ceiling, tracing invisible patterns in the dust motes drifting in the slanting sunlight. Thoughts swirl—heavy and tangled.

Who am I when no one's watching? When the mask slips, even for a second?

The answer is never simple.

I remember a Sunday morning, the church filled with the usual crowd. The choir sang hymns with voices so loud it felt like the walls might crumble. I was supposed to stand at the front, singing with perfect posture, eyes bright, voice steady.

But that day, my hands trembled as I clutched the hymnal. A glance toward the pews caught my mother's eyes—stern, hopeful, desperate for the "perfect son."

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My throat tightened. The words of the hymn felt like a lie sliding off my tongue.

"I am fearfully and wonderfully made..." but I felt anything but.

In that moment, the boy who sang with a smile vanished. There was only the silent scream behind my eyes, the secret I couldn't share…

Back to the present.

The house around me feels like a cage. My mother's prayers hang in the air like chains, my father's silence a wall closing in.

But inside me, a spark flickers.

It's fragile and small—maybe even foolish—but it's there.

One evening, after dinner, my father said nothing as we sat in the living room. Then, without looking at me, he muttered, "You've brought shame."

His words landed like stones.

I wanted to scream back, to say, "I'm still your son. I'm still here."

But I only swallowed and stared at my hands, feeling them tremble again.

Why does love have to hurt like this?

I remember the letter I wrote when I was twelve. Hidden beneath my mattress, in shaky handwriting:

"Dear God, if you're really there, please make me normal. Please make me disappear."

Tears blurred the words as I folded the paper carefully.

I never sent it.

But now?

Music has become my sanctuary. The strings beneath my fingers vibrate with truths I cannot say aloud. Each note is a confession. Each melody a prayer for freedom.

I write songs no one will hear—fragments of my soul captured in scribbled lyrics and trembling chords.

In these moments, I feel whole.

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Not perfect. Not healed.

But alive.

This morning, I caught my reflection—thin, tired, a shadow of the boy I used to be.

For a moment, I stared into my own eyes, searching for the boy behind the mask.

The question rose again.

Am I brave enough to stop hiding?

I touched my lips, the same lips that once smiled so easily.

And in that silent mirror, I made a promise.

One day, I will find the courage to be seen.

And then there's Eli—the boy who vanished like a breeze.

His smile still haunts the quiet corners of my mind.

I want to believe he saw me—the real me, not the golden boy, not the choir child.

Sometimes, I think he did.

Sometimes, I think he was the first person who loved a part of me no one else dared.

But now?

I know the road ahead will be lonely.

There will be nights when the silence is deafening, and the memories claw their way back.

When the words *"sin"* and *"shame"* echo louder than my own heartbeat.

But maybe, just maybe, the quiet revolution inside me is stronger than the fear.

Maybe I don't have to disappear.

Maybe I can learn to exist—as Noah, not the boy they want me to be.

I close my eyes and let the melody rise, carrying me beyond the walls, beyond the prayers, beyond the judgment.

For a moment, I am free.

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And in that freedom, I find hope.

Chapter Five

When the Spirit Broke Through

The rain had stopped just before sunrise, leaving the world washed and quiet. Birds sang over puddles and rooftops, and a faint golden hue bled into the sky.

I sat at the edge of my bed, lacing up my shoes slowly, like someone preparing for battle.

It was Sunday.

I hadn't been to church since the Malik incident. Not properly, anyway. But now, for reasons I couldn't name, I felt pulled. Not by guilt—I was tired of guilt—but by something quieter. A kind of ache.

The church building stood just as I remembered it—whitewashed walls, a cross above the door, paint peeling on the side. Familiar. Unchanged. But everything inside me had changed.

As I stepped inside, a wave of scent hit me—wood polish, perfume, dust, and old hymnbooks.

The worship team was already singing. A soft chorus floated through the air:

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♪ *"I surrender all… all to Thee, my blessed Savior…"* ♪

I slipped into a back pew.

People stared. I felt it.

Some with concern. Some with curiosity. A few with quiet judgment. But none of it mattered—not really. I wasn't there for them.

I kept my eyes forward, letting the music wash over me. And for the first time in months, I felt the tightness in my chest loosen just slightly.

After the service, as people filtered out, Pastor Samuel approached me.

He was an older man, graying at the sides, with eyes that had seen too much and still chose gentleness.

"Noah," he said softly. "You're always welcome here."

I swallowed. "Even after... everything?"

His eyes held mine. "Especially after everything."

We sat on a bench outside, the sun warming the stone.

"I've been... lost," I admitted, voice thin.

He nodded. "You're not the first. And you won't be the last. The gospel wasn't made for perfect people, Noah—it was made for the broken."

I stared at the ground. "What if I'm too broken?"

"You're not," he said firmly. "You're just early in your journey. Don't confuse wrestling with rejection."

That night, I found my old Bible in the back of my wardrobe. I hadn't touched it in months.

I flipped through its pages, fingers trembling, until I landed on a verse I'd underlined long ago—Psalm 34:18:

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

The words didn't fix me.

But they found me.

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The next Sunday, I sat closer to the front.

The choir's voices rose around me, and something in my chest cracked open. Tears spilled down my cheeks as they sang that song – RECKLESS LOVE

♪ *"There's no shadow You won't light up, mountain You won't climb up, coming after me..."* ♪

I covered my face with my hands.

Not out of shame this time—but because the love I'd spent my whole life chasing was beginning to chase me back.

Weeks later, in the quiet of Pastor Samuel's office, I spoke slowly:

"There are parts of me... that don't fit the version of myself everyone wants. That I even want."

He didn't interrupt. He let silence do its work.

"And I don't know how to be holy with this mess in me."

Finally, he spoke. "You don't clean yourself then come to God, Noah. You come to God as you are. And then He begins the cleaning."

Late one evening, I sat with my guitar, whispering lyrics into the darkness.

They weren't polished. They weren't for anyone but me.

♪ *"I don't have the answers, I don't know the way / But I'm tired of running, so Lord, I'll stay."* ♪

My voice cracked. But it was a prayer.

And maybe that was enough.

This chapter didn't end with me being "fixed." It didn't turn me into a poster boy overnight. But it ignited something—a hunger for more than shame.

I began to return to church, not as the perfect child, but as a prodigal who wanted to believe redemption was real.

And slowly, painfully, I began to open my heart.

Not just to God.

But to myself.

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Wednesday evening. I found myself sitting in a half-circle of folding chairs in the church's youth room. A fan spun noisily above, barely cutting the heat.

It had been years since I attended one of these. I remembered the memory verses, the awkward silences, the occasional bursts of laughter. But tonight felt different.

Pastor Mercy, a younger assistant pastor with a calm but fiery voice, was leading the discussion.

"Let's be honest," she said. "Following Jesus isn't about checking off moral boxes. It's about transformation. Real transformation begins when you stop pretending."

She looked directly at me—not with suspicion, but with startling gentleness.

"What's one thing you've been pretending doesn't hurt?" she asked the room.

My throat tightened. Around me, others shifted uncomfortably.

I wanted to speak.

I wanted to say: *"I've been pretending I'm okay being who they told me I had to be. I've been pretending I'm not afraid. I've been pretending I'm not lonely."*

But instead, I whispered, "Not knowing who I really am."

A pause. No one laughed. No one spoke. And for the first time, silence felt holy.

Pastor Mercy nodded. "Then that's where Jesus wants to meet you."

Later that week, I arrived home from church just as my mother was serving tea.

"You've been going back," she said without looking up. "Church."

I nodded. "Yeah."

A long pause.

"Just don't make it a show," she added sharply. "God sees hearts. Not tears."

I flinched. "I'm not making anything a show. I'm... trying."

She didn't respond. The silence between us stretched like a taut rope.

Then softly, she said, "You used to sing with such joy."

"I still do," I said, almost defiantly. "But now I mean it."

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Her eyes flicked up to me then. For a moment, she seemed unsure whether to believe me. Maybe she didn't. But that didn't matter. For the first time in my life, I did.

One night, I sat cross-legged on my bedroom floor, lights off, a single candle flickering.

The air was still. The Bible lay open in my lap. I had been reading from Luke—the story of the prodigal son. The part where the father runs to meet his child, robes trailing, arms wide.

And something inside me broke open.

I didn't cry hard. Just... a few tears, falling quietly.

I reached for my guitar. Strummed a few soft chords. And then I sang, not for anyone to hear, not even for myself:

♪ *"I don't have to run no more / I'm not who I was before / Let grace write my name on the floor / Of this heart You adore."* ♪

I didn't need applause. I didn't even need answers.

I only needed the silence, the melody, and the presence I hoped was listening.

That same night, before bed, I stood by my window.

The stars were out.

I folded my hands—not because I had to, but because it felt right.

"God... I don't know how to do this. I don't know what parts of me need to die and what parts need to be loved back to life. But... if You're still there, if You still want me... I'm here."

No thunder answered. No visions. Just stillness.

But in the stillness, I felt the warmth in my chest again.

Not fire.

Just ember.

But maybe that was enough to begin.

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Chapter Six

The Light Between Shadows

Monday morning came like a whisper and a warning. I stood before the mirror, fastening my shirt, sliding my Bible between worn notebooks. It felt fragile, silly almost—but it meant something. Something small, something brave. I wasn't hiding anymore. Or at least, I was trying not to.

School hadn't changed. The halls still buzzed with noise—half-laughter, half-war. But I had. I walked differently now. Not taller, not stronger. Just quieter. Like a thread had been tied between my heart and heaven, and I didn't want to break it.

During lunch, I slipped into the music room. Just me and the piano. I ran my fingers across the keys, slowly, like I was rediscovering an old friend. The melody came again—the same one I wrote that night after the church service. It carried something I couldn't name. A sadness maybe. Or a seed of hope.

Jamal, a boy who usually mocked everything, leaned against the doorframe.

"Yo, that yours?"

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I froze. "Yeah... I guess."

He nodded, not unkindly. "Sounds deep. Like it's sayin' somethin'."

"It is," I whispered, more to myself.

He didn't laugh. Just walked away, like he'd heard something sacred.

Friday came like a dare. The guest speaker for the school fellowship didn't show up, and out of nowhere, one of the teachers looked at me.

"Noah. Would you like to say something?"

Panic rose in my throat.

Say something? *Me?*

But my feet moved before my fear could stop them. I took the mic like it was a cross I hadn't trained to carry.

I cleared my throat. "I don't have a sermon. I'm not a preacher. But... I know what it means to feel like you're never enough. To wake up and hate who you are. To wonder if God sees you at all."

My voice cracked. No one laughed.

"But one night, I realized something. Jesus didn't wait for me to be perfect. He came looking when I was still lost. He called me worthy when I couldn't lift my head."

Silence.

"So I'm not here to act holy. I'm just here to say: you're not too far gone. And maybe... maybe neither am I."

When I stepped down, the applause was soft. But it was real.

Afterward, the teacher who called on me—Mr. Makembo—caught up with me near the corridor.

"Noah," he said gently, his hand on my shoulder. "I've been a teacher for years. I've never seen students listen like that before. Don't underestimate what God can do with your honesty."

His words followed me like a quiet hug. Like a prophecy I wasn't sure I believed yet.

That night, my phone buzzed.

Eli: *Hey. It's been a while. Can we talk?*

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I stared at the screen for a long time. My hands shook.

I remembered the way he smiled. The way I felt when I saw him. I remembered the guilt. The ache. The confusion.

I typed slowly.

Me: *I'm still figuring myself out. Maybe not tonight. But thank you for reaching out.*

I didn't delete him.

But I didn't reply again either.

Later, I laced up my shoes and ran. No destination, just movement. Worship music thumped in my ears. The night wind slapped my face, stung my eyes.

I whispered between breaths, "God, I don't want to go back. Please... help me not go back."

And for the first time, I didn't feel alone in the asking.

When I returned home, I sat on my bed, journal open, pen shaking in my fingers.

Faith isn't a performance. It's not a Sunday thing. It's the way I breathe when no one's watching.

Today, I chose not to run from who I'm becoming. I chose the light. Even if it hurt my eyes.

I think that's what bravery is. Not absence of fear. Just movement anyway.

I paused, then reached into my drawer and pulled out an old note card. On it, I scribbled a verse I had read earlier in the week: *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." —Isaiah 43:1.*

I looked at the words for a long time.

I folded the note and placed it in the back of my Bible.

Then, I did something I hadn't done in weeks—I knelt.

There, beside my bed, I whispered a prayer. Not rehearsed. Not loud. Just raw.

"God... if You're still writing my story, please don't let it end in silence. Help me walk this. Even when it hurts."

A tear slid down my cheek. Then another.

As I stood, the air in the room felt different. Not lighter, exactly. But clearer. Like I wasn't the only one in it anymore.

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As I reached to close the journal, a knock came on my door. My mother.

She stepped halfway in. "You looked... peaceful today. Like someone I used to know."

I didn't say anything. But I nodded, and she closed the door quietly behind her.

And as I turned off the light, I realized:

I'm not healed. I'm not whole.

But I'm held.

And maybe that's enough for now.

Chapter Seven

Fire on the Altar

Sunday came clothed in gold and gentle air. I wore my best shirt, the one with a tiny hole at the seam that I always hoped no one would notice. As we entered the sanctuary, I could smell old hymn books and fresh lilies. The sun poured through the stained-glass windows like heaven had something to say.

During praise and worship, something inside me loosened. The music wasn't loud; it was *real*. Not a performance, but a people crying out. I raised my hands, unsure if I was reaching for God or just surrendering to Him. Maybe both.

Pastor Grace preached that morning. She wasn't dramatic, but her words felt lit from within.

"There is no sin strong enough to erase God's love," she said. "You are not your shame. You are not your past. You are His."

I stared at the floor tiles, their cracks and specks of wax catching the light like veins. I thought about all the things I never said out loud—the thoughts I buried, the nights I cried into my pillow, the silence I wore like a second skin.

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And then, like a flash in the dark, I thought of Jesus. Not the one hanging on the church wall, but the one who bent low in the dust. The one who said, *"Neither do I condemn you."*

I wasn't sure I believed Him yet. But for the first time, I wanted to.

Toward the end of the service, Pastor Grace opened the altar. "If you need to talk to God today... come. Don't worry about who's watching."

My feet moved on their own. I knelt near the front, not caring if anyone whispered. My chest trembled. I didn't have words, just sobs that came in waves. And somewhere in the blur of tears and music, I whispered, *"Take it, God. All of it. Even the parts I don't know how to name."*

No thunder split the sky. But something inside me shifted. Like a door cracked open, letting in a sliver of light.

After the service, I stayed behind. Just sat in the back pew as people left. I didn't want to rush the moment. I wanted to keep the stillness alive, even if just a little longer.

Pastor Grace came over and sat beside me.

"I saw you standing today," she said softly.

I nodded. "I don't know what's happening to me."

She smiled. "That's usually when God is doing the most."

We sat in silence for a while. She didn't preach at me. She didn't pry. She just stayed.

And I realized—I didn't need someone to *fix* me. I needed someone to *see* me.

That night, I went back to my journal.

God, I'm scared. But I don't want to run anymore. Make me a fire on Your altar. Even if it means burning away everything I used to be.

Then I opened my drawer and pulled out a folded paper I had written years ago—the one that begged God to make me "normal."

I stared at it for a long time. Then slowly, I walked outside and lit a match. The paper curled, blackened, and vanished in the wind.

That's not who I am anymore, I thought. *That's not the prayer I'm praying now.*

And for the first time, I didn't feel like I was pretending to be saved.

I felt... new.

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Or at least, being made new.

And that was enough to keep me going.

The following week, I joined a Bible study group—not because anyone forced me, but because I *wanted* to know. The group was small: four other teens and Sister Mary, who somehow made scripture feel like it had a heartbeat.

We studied Psalm 51. As each person read a verse aloud, I found my breath catching at verse ten:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

I repeated it under my breath. Again. And again. It felt like it had been written for me.

Afterward, Sister Mary pulled me aside. "There's a quiet hunger in you," she said. "Don't starve it. Let it grow."

I nodded, not knowing what to say. Maybe I didn't need to say anything.

That night, I stayed up late writing in my journal. Pages poured out of me—prayers, questions, even poems I didn't understand but felt were necessary.

One read:

I was a cracked jar But You filled me with light. And somehow, The leaking makes me shine.

I closed the book and held it to my chest.

Maybe this was what it meant to be on fire—not perfect, not loud, but fully surrendered.

I wasn't who I used to be.

I wasn't yet who I was becoming.

But in the hands of God, even ashes find purpose.

And that... was holy.

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Chapter Eight

Becoming Flame

I didn't wake up the next morning feeling holy. There were no halos in the mirror, no angel choirs humming in my ears. Just me—Noah. Tired eyes, tangled bedsheets, and a strange, warm ache in my chest like something had cracked and light was leaking through.
But something was different.

It started in small things. I opened my Bible—not out of guilt, but hunger. The words didn't all make sense, but they felt alive, like seeds pressing beneath soil.
"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation…"
I read it slowly. Again. And again.
A new creation.
Could that really be me?

That afternoon, I asked to meet with Pastor Grace. She welcomed me into her small office behind the pulpit. The walls were lined with books—some old, some new—and a mug sat on her desk with the words *"grace wins every time."*

"I don't know what to do with all this," I admitted, voice shaky.
She smiled gently. "You don't have to know everything today. Becoming who God made you to be isn't about rushing. It's about surrendering."

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I blinked hard. "But I've messed up. I've… thought things I can't even say out loud."

Her eyes didn't flinch. "Jesus isn't scared of your thoughts. He wants your honesty, not your perfection."

We prayed together. No thunder, no lightning. Just two voices tangled in the stillness. And a whisper in my soul: *You are not alone.*

Later that week, I showed up at the church youth group. I almost didn't. I stood outside the door, debating. But I walked in—and something in me didn't flinch.

We sat in a circle. The topic was identity. The leader, a kind-eyed guy named Moses, asked us to describe ourselves without using labels.

I panicked. But when it was my turn, I surprised myself.
"I'm Noah," I said slowly. "I've spent most of my life being who everyone else needed. But I'm learning that maybe… God wants me to just be me."

A few people nodded. One girl smiled. Moses said, "That's exactly it."

And for the first time, I didn't feel like I had to explain everything. I didn't have to defend or hide. I could just be.

That night, I wrote a letter I never intended to send.

Dear Eli,
You probably don't even remember me the way I remember you. But I wanted to say thank you. You saw something in me that I didn't have the words for yet. You reminded me that kindness isn't always loud. That being seen is a kind of healing.
I'm changing now. I'm not who I was when you left. And I don't know where you are, but if by some miracle you ever hear this, just know—I'm not ashamed of the boy you smiled at.
I'm learning to smile at him too.

One evening, I took a walk behind the church alone. The sky blushed with dusk, and the air smelled like eucalyptus and dust.

I prayed aloud.
Not fancy. Not polished.
Just honest.

"God, I don't want to be golden. I want to be real. I want to be Yours. Whatever that means. Whatever it costs."

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And in that breath, I felt it.
Peace.
Like the soil of my soul had finally stopped shaking. Not perfect. But rooted.

I didn't tell my parents everything yet. But I started saying "I love you" more often. I started washing dishes without being asked. I even left my journal open once, just enough for my mother to glimpse a verse I had copied out carefully:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

She didn't say anything. But the next day, she left my favorite tea on my desk without a word. Maybe that was her way of saying *I see you.*

I'm still becoming Noah. Not the one people crafted in their hopes and warnings. Not the scared version I tried to be.
But the one God is gently shaping, breath by breath.

And this becoming—it's the hardest thing I've ever done.
But it's also the holiest.

Because for the first time, I'm not chasing perfection.
I'm chasing Jesus.
And He's not running away.

It's strange how peace doesn't always come with trumpets. Sometimes it comes with silence—and a strange stillness in your chest, like the storm is learning to be quiet.

That week, I kept returning to church. Not because I had to, but because I couldn't stay away.

I sat in the sanctuary on a quiet Thursday afternoon. No one else was there—just the echoes of old songs still hanging in the air. I walked up to the altar, sat cross-legged on the floor, and just breathed.

There were no visions. No burning bushes.
Only presence.
Only... Him.

Pastor Grace invited me to her office the next day. Her walls were lined with books and quiet colors. There was a cross above her desk, not the polished kind but rugged, made from olive wood.

She motioned for me to sit. "How are you feeling, Noah?"

I hesitated. "Different. But not sure what to do with it."

"That's a start," she said. "The Spirit works best with surrendered hearts, not perfect ones."

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I looked down at my hands. "I'm scared I'll fall again."

"You probably will," she said gently. "But falling isn't the end. Staying down is."

Then she handed me a small card. On it was a verse:
"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion..." — Philippians 1:6

I stared at it.
"God's not done with you, Noah," she said. "Not even close."

That evening, I remembered a youth campfire service from years ago. I was ten. The flames danced high. The youth leader had talked about giving everything to Jesus.

I had raised my hand timidly, heart pounding, wanting to believe.

But life happened.
Shame happened.
And I buried that moment like it had never existed.

But now, in this present moment, I feel God calling me back to that fire—not the literal one, but the one inside me. The one that had never truly gone out.

The following Sunday, we celebrated communion.

As I lined up, I felt a lump rise in my throat. The bread. The cup. The mystery of it all. I had always thought I wasn't worthy. That somehow, I had to clean myself up before coming to the table.

But now I knew—I come because I'm broken. I come because I need Him.

When Pastor Grace placed the wafer in my hand and whispered, *"The body of Christ, broken for you,"* I believed it.

When the cup touched my lips, I tasted grace—not just for the first time, but fully.

Back home, I took out my guitar again.

I had stopped playing when I felt like a fraud. Like music was too pure for someone like me.

But now I strummed lightly—slowly, reverently. Words came. A song I didn't expect.

You knew the mess, the ache, the fight
But still You called me into light
I ran from love, from truth, from grace
But You still waited—face to face

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

My voice cracked. But I sang it anyway. For Him. For me.
And when I finished, I cried.
Not from shame.
From awe.

That night, lying in bed, I thought about the boy I used to be—the one begging God to make him disappear.

I whispered into the dark, *"Thank You for not listening to that prayer."*

I'm still Noah. Still awkward, still learning.

But I'm no longer lost.
Not completely.

I've come home—not just to church, but to myself.

And maybe that's what it means to be the prodigal—not just returning to God, but letting Him walk into every broken hallway of your heart, and light a lamp there.

So here I am.
Not perfect.

Not done.
But finally... found.

The week that followed wasn't easy. You would think that after a moment like that—kneeling at the altar, handing God the wreckage of your heart—things would magically become brighter. Simpler.

But healing, I'm learning, is not a magic trick. It's a slow burn. Sometimes a painful one.

My mornings started earlier now. Before the sun rose, I would sit on the edge of my bed and whisper, *"God, I'm here."* Most times, I didn't feel anything. Just silence. But I kept showing up. Somehow, I knew He was listening.

I started volunteering at church. Cleaning chairs, helping Sister Mary with the younger kids, tuning the old church guitar that always seemed slightly out of tune—a lot like me.

One Saturday morning, we visited a nearby orphanage to sing worship songs and tell Bible stories. I watched the children, their eyes wide, their laughter ringing out freely. Some of them clung to me like I was something safe. I didn't know what to do with that.

Afterward, as we walked back, Sister Mary said, *"You looked like someone who belonged there."*
"I don't know what that means," I said.
She smiled. *"It means God isn't just healing you for you. He's making you into a balm for others."*

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

That night, I cried again. Not out of pain this time, but because I was starting to feel useful. I was starting to believe that maybe my life could matter.

But the old voice still visited.

It crept in late at night, whispering shame, replaying memories. Eli's smile. My mother's disappointed stare. The letter I burned. Some nights I felt like I was fighting shadows.

One night, I woke up sweating, a cold ache in my chest. I stumbled to my desk and opened my journal. My pen shook as I wrote:

God, I want to be whole. But I still feel split. Is it okay to feel both loved and lost at the same time?

I didn't hear an answer, but I felt a stillness settle over me. Like God saying, *Keep writing. I'm not done yet.*

A few Sundays later, Pastor Grace asked me to share something with the youth during service. I almost said no. My heart pounded so hard, I thought it might crack my ribs. But I said yes.

I stood in front of the microphone, fingers stiff, voice trembling.

“I don’t have a fancy testimony,” I began. “I’m just... a boy who thought he was too broken for God. But He found me anyway.”

The room was silent. I swallowed and kept going.

“There are nights I still wonder if I’m really saved. But every day, I wake up and decide to believe again. I think that’s what faith is. Not feeling it. Choosing it.”

I picked up the guitar and played a simple song I had written, one that sounded like a prayer more than a performance. My voice cracked halfway through, but I kept going.

When I finished, no one clapped. They just stood. Silent. Reverent. And for a second, I wasn’t afraid.

After the service, a boy came up to me—he couldn’t have been more than thirteen.

“I feel the same things you said,” he whispered.

I knelt so we were eye-level. “Then we’re not alone.”

One afternoon, I sat with Pastor Grace under the jacaranda tree behind the church. Purple petals covered the ground like confetti from heaven.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

“Why does it still hurt sometimes?” I asked.

“Because healing doesn't erase the wound. It redefines it,” she said. *"The scar remains. But it no longer bleeds."*

We sat quietly. Then she added,

“You’re becoming a flame, Noah. Not a wildfire that consumes, but a steady fire that warms. Let it burn.”

That night, I returned to Psalm 51.

“Create in me a clean heart.” I whispered it until I fell asleep.

Not perfect. Not fixed.

But burning.
Becoming.
Alive.

Chapter Nine

The Narrow Path

Some days felt like walking through fire. The flames of my new faith warmed my heart, yes—but they also burned away old comforts, old masks, old lies I had clung to for so long.

I discovered that becoming who God made me to be wasn't a straight road. It was narrow, rocky, sometimes lonely.

One morning, I woke up with a heavy cloud over my chest. The peace I'd felt was gone. My prayers felt like whispers lost in a storm.

"Am I really changing, or just pretending again?" I wondered aloud.

I opened my Bible to the Psalms, hoping to find a lifeline. My eyes caught Psalm 73: "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." But what about me? Could my heart ever be pure?

I found myself back in Pastor Grace's office that day, desperate for answers.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

"I feel like I'm stuck," I confessed. "Like I'm not moving forward, and the old doubts keep pulling me back."

She nodded knowingly. "Faith isn't a finish line, Noah. It's a daily choice to keep walking—even when you don't see the whole path."

Her voice softened. "Remember, the narrow path Jesus talks about isn't meant to be easy. It's meant to shape you."

At choir practice that evening, my voice wavered as I sang. The hymns felt different now—less performance, more confession.

A girl beside me, Anna, smiled and whispered, "It's okay to sound human."

Her words felt like a balm. Maybe being human—flawed, scared, uncertain—was part of becoming holy.

Back at home, the silence between me and my parents grew heavier. My mother's eyes were softer but still full of questions she didn't voice. My father's distance remained, a constant reminder of the shame he couldn't reconcile.

One night, after a quiet dinner, I finally spoke. "I'm trying, Mom. I'm really trying."

She reached out, fingers trembling. "I see you, Noah. More than you know."

That small moment cracked open a door we hadn't dared touch.

Then came a setback. A harsh word from a friend, a bitter memory resurfaced, a mistake I made in haste.

The old voice sneered again: *You're not good enough. You'll never be enough.*

I fell to my knees in my room, sobbing—not for weakness, but for the strength I longed for.

Through tears, I remembered a truth I'd learned slowly: Grace isn't about perfection. It's about persistence.

A few weeks later, our church youth group went on retreat. Surrounded by nature, the stillness was deafening.

During a bonfire session, we shared our struggles. I listened as others bared their souls—fears, failures, hopes.

When it was my turn, I said, "I'm walking a narrow path. It's hard, and sometimes I want to give up. But I'm learning to trust the One who leads me."

Silence followed, then nods and quiet smiles. I realized I wasn't alone after all.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

One morning, as the sun spilled gold over the hills, I sat with my guitar and wrote a new song.

It wasn't loud or perfect, but it was honest:

Not by might, not by power,
But by Your Spirit, Lord,
I'm learning to walk this narrow road,
With faith as my sword.

I sang it softly, letting the words settle deep inside me.

The narrow path isn't easy. It tests every part of me—my courage, my patience, my love. But every step teaches me more about who I am, and whose I am.

I am not perfect. I am still broken. Still learning. Still becoming.

But I am no longer running.

And on this narrow path, with Jesus beside me, I believe I can keep walking—one step at a time.

Chapter Ten

The Light That Remains

The morning sun filtered softly through my window, casting long, gentle shadows across the room. I sat on the edge of my bed, hands folded, heart quietly steady. The road I'd walked to get here wasn't straight or smooth. It was jagged—full of silence and storms, of broken pieces and unexpected grace.

But here I was.

No longer the boy who wanted to disappear.

No longer the scared child hiding behind layers of fear.

I was Noah.

Not perfect.

Not fully healed.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

But whole enough.

Real enough.

In the quiet sanctuary garden, the jacaranda trees bloomed in a cascade of purple petals. Pastor Grace's smile was soft, her eyes full of the many seasons we had shared.

"You've come so far, Noah," she said, her voice a balm to my restless soul.

I looked down at my hands, tracing invisible scars. "But sometimes... I wonder. Am I really enough? Do I really belong?"

She reached out, her hand steady on mine. "Enough isn't about how much you've done or how perfect you are. It's about whose you are. You belong to God, and in that belonging, everything changes."

Her words sank deep, like roots seeking water in the dry places of my heart.

That Sunday, standing before the congregation, my hands trembled—but my voice held steady.

"I used to believe I was too broken for God's love," I began, eyes searching the crowd. "That parts of me needed to be hidden, silenced, or fixed before I could be accepted."

Faces looked back—some kind, some uncertain, others moved.

"But God showed me His love isn't about hiding or pretending. It's about coming as you are—flawed, scared, hopeful. And in that love, I found freedom. I found hope. I found *me*."

A hush lingered for a heartbeat, then applause rose—gentle but sincere.

It wasn't about being perfect. It was about being *real*.

Later, I sat with my mother and father in the quiet of our living room. The air felt different—not heavy, but soft.

"I'm proud of you, Noah," my mother whispered, voice thick with tears. "Not because you're perfect—but because you're brave enough to be yourself."

My father's gaze met mine, a new vulnerability there.

"I'm sorry I didn't understand you," he said.

I nodded, feeling a weight lift. "We're both learning. And I love you."

That evening, the church hummed with light and song. I sang again in the choir—not for show, but as a heartfelt praise. My voice no longer quivered with fear but soared with gratitude.

As the notes filled the room, I saw Eli's smile flicker in my memory—a beacon of kindness that had once felt so distant.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

And I knew: this journey wasn't finished.

But the light I carried now—the light that refused to be snuffed out—would always remain.

The Light That Remains

I was once a shadow,
Afraid to show my face.
Lost in silent battles,
Running from my place.

But in the darkest moment,
A whisper called my name.
A love unbroken,
A steady, burning flame.

Now I stand, unhidden,
With scars that tell my tale.

Not perfect, not finished—
Yet, I will not fail.

For grace is my anchor,
And hope my steadfast guide.
The light that remains within me
Will never be denied.

Final Prayer

Lord, make me a light that remains—
Not a flicker that fades with the wind,
But a steady flame that warms the coldest nights.

Help me carry Your love through the shadows,
To walk in courage when fear whispers,
To shine truth where doubt has settled.

Let me be a beacon for the lost,
A refuge for the weary,
And a testament to Your unending grace.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

In Your hands, I am made new.
In Your love, I find my home.
May this light never dim, and this heart never stray.

Amen.

The Light We Carry

In the quiet corners of our souls,
Where shadows stretch and doubts unfold,
There lies a spark, a gentle flame—
A whispered hope, a sacred name.

We walk through storms, through fire and rain,
Through nights of sorrow, days of pain.
Yet in the dark, that light remains,
Unbroken, fierce, it calls our names.

It is the song we dare not sing,
The silent prayer that hope will bring.
A promise etched in breath and bone:
We are never truly alone.

So hold your scars like badges worn,
Embrace the night that shapes the dawn.
For in the dance of loss and grace,
We find our home, our resting place.

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

This light we carry, wild and free,
Is the flame of who we're meant to be.
Not perfect, not complete, but true—
A reflection of God's love in you.

Author's Note

There are stories that entertain. Others that inform. And then there are stories like this one—stories that bleed from the inside out, that are whispered rather than written, lived rather than imagined.

Where the Lost Are Found began as more than a character's journey. It was, in many ways, my own. Noah is fictional, yes. But the questions he asks, the ache he carries, the quiet prayers he whispers into the night—they are drawn from very real places.

If you've ever wrestled with identity, with faith, with silence, or shame… this story was written for you.

I believe in the slow, sacred work of becoming. Of finding light after darkness. Of being called by name when you feel forgotten. This book isn't about perfection. It's about transformation. It's about grace that chases you down, not when you're strong—but when you're hiding.

My hope is that through Noah's journey, you've caught glimpses of your own. Maybe in the fragile beginnings. Maybe in the breaking. Or maybe in the quiet becoming.

Thank you for walking with him. With me.

You are not alone.

You are not too far.

You are, even now… being found.

— *Joshua Patrick Magezi*

IT IS A THING OF THE MIND YOU TOO CAN

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